

4905
S E R M O N

On the MURDER of

Mr. FRANCIS BEST.



MR. FRANCIS B. ST.

1

MURDER lamented and improved.

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT
KIDDERMINSTER,

June 16, 1771.

On Occasion of the Death of

Mr. FRANCIS BEST,

Who was Robbed and Murdered by John Child, on
Saturday, June 8.

To which is added,

A N A R R A T I V E

Of the principal Circumstances attending the Murder,
and the Trial and Execution of the Criminal.

By BENJAMIN FAWCETT^K, M. A.

S H R E W S B U R Y :

Printed by J. EDDOWES, and sold by J. BUCKLAND,
at No. 57, Paternoster-Row, LONDON. 1771.

[Price Six-pence.]

Exhibited from September 1st to 1st October 1881

0

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE PUBLIC

AND TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES



AND TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE PUBLIC

AND TO THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

18

2 SAMUEL iii. 34.

Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters; as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him.

IN this uncertain world we are ever liable to meet with awful changes. Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. ^a Man's apostate nature is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. ^b Burning coals cannot send forth sparks so numerous, or so quick and constant in their succession, as the afflictions of our mortal state. See, how high they rise, how wide they spread, how their influence reaches to every stage, every various condition, and every distinct relation of human life!

So incapable are we of looking thro' a train of future consequences, that we know not what a day may bring forth. ^c Hence it comes to pass, that every unexpected event hath to us the appearance of novelty. And if any event be sudden and awful, calamitous and distressing, in proportion to its novelty, who can avoid being

B

deeply

^a 1 Chron. xxix. 15.^b Job v. 7.^c Prov. xxvii. 1.

deeply impressed? Yet in our more deliberate reflection and calmer moments, we shall see reason to conclude, that there is no event altogether new. *The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.*^d

The sudden and awful death we are now lamenting, tho' new to us, hath had, in former days, its too many similar instances. It is very remarkable, that the first man who died out of our world, was an instance of this kind; even righteous *Abel*, whose precious blood was spilt by that daring murderer his wicked brother *Cain*. Another instance we have strongly marked out to us, in the words of the text. It was concerning *Abner*, captain of the host of *Israel*, that *David* himself, in a funeral oration at the grave, and as the chief mourner there, most pathetically said; *Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters; as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou.*

There is indeed such a peculiar suitableness in the text to the present mournful occasion, that the thoughts of every attentive hearer will need little assistance in considering,

First, What there is in the text remarkably expressive of the very afflictive scene, into which divine Providence hath now brought us: and,

Secondly,

^d Eccles. i. 9, 10.

Secondly, What useful lessons such a scene of affliction should inculcate upon us.

I. In considering what there is in the text, so remarkably expressive of our present affliction, you can scarce avoid observing these three things; — the speech which was made at the grave of a very respectable person; — a death which was brought about by the most execrable villany; — and that such a death of such a person excited a deep and universal concern.

1. Let us observe, that the text contains the speech, which was made at the grave of a very respectable person.

David, speaking at the grave of *Abner*, was sensibly struck at the loss of so great a man: such an able general, a person of such consummate valour and policy, nearly related to *Saul*, the preceding king of *Israel*, and who, but lately had the first hand in disposing of a kingdom. This accounts for the apparent emotion, with which *the king said unto his servants*, at the close of his funeral, *Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?**

We have lately been at the grave of a person, who was truly respectable for his goodness, which is far better than what the world calls greatness. He was a very useful member of society, an honest tradesman, an affectionate father, a kind master, and, what in his profession of a miller is of no inconsiderable value, even

B 2

the

the poorest people in the town will testify for him, that he was a confederate, generous and obliging friend and neighbour. He had been about twenty-five years, I hope I may truly say, a worthy communicant in this church. Methinks I see him, as he was accustomed to sit in this place of worship on Lord's-days, and all other convenient seasons; and who was there among all his fellow-worshippers, either more constant, more serious, or more candid in attending Gospel-ministrations?

2. The next thing observable in the text, is the manner of describing a death, that was brought about by the most execrable villany.

Such was the death of *Abner*. He was treacherously murdered by *Joab*, from the odious, but too common, motives of malice and revenge, of pride and envy. *Joab* was determined, at any rate, to rob *Abner* of all his earthly power and grandeur, and particularly of his growing interest at *David's* court, and in *David's* friendship. In order to perpetrate such a robbery, *Joab* scrupled not to give *Abner* a private stab. This was long after stiled by *David*, in language admirably fit to paint to the life the most detestable hypocrisy, perfidy and cruelty: *Joab's shedding the blood of war in peace, and putting the blood of war upon his girdle, that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet.*

While

While *David* was speaking at *Abner's* grave, he had this wretched murderer full in sight; for *Joab* himself was at the funeral. Such a criminal ought, indeed, to have been immediately arrested and imprisoned, in order to his suffering the death due to a murderer. But the sacred history gives us the painful conviction, that *Joab* was too powerful a villain for so equitable a prince as *David* himself to punish according to his deserts. Every generous mind must therefore feel for *David*, when he was obliged to say, *I am this day weak, tho' anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me. The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.*^s

It must however, have been not a little mortifying to *Joab*, when he heard the description of the manner of *Abner's* death, given by *David* in the text. It was telling *Joab* to his face, that instead of bravely fighting with *Abner*, overcoming him in a fair combat, and detaining him as a prisoner, with his hands bound, and his feet put into fetters; on the contrary, he had treated *Abner* with the greatest injustice and cruelty, and in every respect so dishonourable and treacherous, that all men would look upon him with deserved abhorrence and contempt. With what confusion of mind must *Joab* hear from the lips of *David*, such language as this?

O Abner! thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters, by those that conquered thee in the field of battle; but as the bravest, the wisest, and the best of men may fall before

wicked
 2 Sam. iiii. 39.

wicked men, so fellest thou by the hand of an assassin.

And now, let the words of the text be thought enough, to describe that most execrable villany, by which our worthy friend was so lately brought to his untimely death. It is too painful to dwell upon such a subject. Nor have we the wretched murderer now present, to hear this discourse, as *David* had when he was delivering the funeral oration in the text. Blessed be God there is nothing in our own happy country, to hinder the course of publick justice, so as to prevent murderers, of any rank or quality, from receiving their deserved punishment. But far happier still shall we think ourselves, if we may have some good reason to hope, that the immortal soul, even, of a murderer, is rescued from the more bitter pains of eternal death, by sincere repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Indeed, every principle of humanity and religion should oblige us to pray for such a happy change, in the temper and character of any malefactor, tho' he were one whom we had never heard of before. But, in the present case, we have more peculiar cause for wishing *this* criminal may become a sincere penitent, as his family and friends are so well known, and so much respected, in this neighbourhood. Let us suppose ourselves to have a relative in some such miserable situation, and surely the supposition will make us most tenderly feel for them. And let us express our sympathy by our fervent prayers, that this best support and consolation, which their affliction is capable of receiving, may be afforded, by the spirit and grace of God
effectually

effectually working upon the heart and conscience of a robber and murderer.

3. The text concludes with assuring us, that the concern for such a death, of such a person, was deep and universal.

Never could any funeral oration have more advantageous circumstances concurring together, to render it grateful to every ear, and impressive on every heart. *David*, the royal prophet and the sweet singer of *Israel*, was the illustrious orator. The assembly was numerous and in every view respectable, consisting of princes, priests and people, including at least all *David's* courtiers, and the inhabitants of his royal city. At their first coming to *Abner's* grave we are told, *the king lift up his voice, and wept, and all the people wept.*^h But *David* had no sooner delivered his oration, than *all the people wept again over Abner.* They could not hear, how basely such blood was spilt, without a general groan. Tho' they had wept plentifully before, yet now they poured out floods of tears afresh.

And when have we known any awful event, relating to a private person, that has more engaged the attention of town and country, or filled every breast with more tender sympathy, with more sincere sorrow? But few members of society were more generally known than *Mr. Best*, or more generally respected. A death so sudden, so awful, and of such a person, is inexpressibly shocking to thousands. Every countenance hath made the discovery of deep concern

^h 2 Sam. iii. 32.

cern. Every tongue has told the dismal story. But none can tell, what bereaved friends and relatives have felt, and are continuing to feel, on this most sorrowful occasion.

In such particulars as these, the text appears to be remarkably expressive of our present affliction. We are now to consider,

II. What useful lessons such a scene of affliction hath a more peculiar tendency to inculcate upon us.

i. It should more deeply convince us, that sin is the worst and greatest of all evils.

The report of robbery and murder is horrible to every ear, and makes every heart tremble. But are we not too little affected with what the Lord Jesus Christ, that faithful and true witness, does himself report, concerning the evil nature of sin, as it is rooted in all our hearts, ever since the first apostacy of man from God? *From within*, says the Holy Jesus, *out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evils come from within.*¹ So far as any of these enormities relate to our outward deportment only, we may perhaps think ourselves, and be thought by others, to be irreproachable. But can any one of us lay our hand upon our breast, and appeal to God, as a witness for us, that none of these evils were ever found within us? Have we

we seriously considered, what God himself is represented as seeing in the inhabitants of the old world, *that every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually?*^k Do we recollect, how the same divine testimony is awfully repeated, after the flood had destroyed a world of sinners, that *the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth?*^l When Solomon asks, *who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*^m is not the inquiry well calculated to promote, in every man, the most important self-knowledge, self-condemnation, and penitent return to God? In what other way, or on what other principles, could upright Job say, *how should man be just with God? if he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand.*ⁿ If we really discern the plagues of our own hearts, we shall see an admirable propriety in David's penitent reasonings and prayers, when he says, *If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities: O Lord, who shall stand?*^o *Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.*^p

We every one of us feel our indignation rise against a robber and a murtherer, and it is a just and generous indignation. But do we perceive our indignation rise against the evil thoughts and vile inclinations of our own hearts? We wish to have the hand of publick justice free society from such plagues, as robbers and murtherers. But is it our frequent prayer to God, thro' Christ, to be delivered from the plagues
C of

^k Gen. vi. 5.

^m Prov. xx. 9.

^o Psalm cxxx. 3.

^l Gen. viii. 21.

ⁿ Job ix. 2, 3.

^p Psalm xix. 12.

of our own hearts? When *the scribes and pharisees, at Jerusalem, brought to Christ a woman taken in adultery, and artfully tempted him to say, that she should be stoned, that they might have to accuse him; our Lord made this convincing appeal to their consciences: He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.*¹ On the contrary, when Mr. Bradford, an eminent martyr, in the bloody reign of Queen Mary, saw a malefactor going to Tyburn, he humbly adored the distinguishing grace of God, 'to which, says he, it is entirely owing, that John Bradford is not in that man's condition.' While we are pleased with the thought, of having the life of a robber and murderer sacrificed to the peace and safety of society; let us, at the same time, earnestly desire to have our most secret sins appear to us, as the greatest of evils, as the very plagues which threaten our immortal souls with eternal death, *except we repent and be converted.*'

2. This scene of affliction may lead us to reflect on the vanity, which attends human life, even in its most prosperous state.

Like our deceased friend, till a very few minutes before his death, we may be in health and vigour of body and mind; every desirable comfort on earth may surround us; our worldly affairs may prosper. But, by some evil accident, or some instrument of wickedness, which we

¹ John viii. 3—9.

² Acts iii. 19.

we could not possibly foresee, and in a moment we thought not of, all our enjoyments, and even life itself, may be taken from us, and no mortal wisdom, care, or integrity, be able to prevent it. In this view of our state and condition, we are obliged to assent to *Solomon's* conclusion, as perfectly seasonable and unexceptionable, and under the full force of conviction, to cry out, *Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity!*^s We can even make *David's* important addition to the humbling reflection, and say, *Verily, every man, at his best state, is altogether vanity!*^t

Alas! our reflections, tho' just, are apt to come too late. We are prone for a long time to shut our eyes, when they ought to be always open. How insensibly are we led to trust in mortal life, and its precarious comforts, tho' as moveable as the waves of the sea! This or that shocking event may draw from our lips the cry of vanity, while in the prevailing temper of our minds, we may be of their number, whose *inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations.*^u Easily may we approve our Lord's description of the rich fool, and as readily join in condemning such folly; but at the same time, may be secretly saying to our own Soul, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry; not considering that God may say, even, to us, ye fools, this night, or this morning, or this moment, your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be which you have provided?*^w

C 2

Under

^s Eccles. i. 2.^u Psalm xlix. 11.^t Psalm xxxix. 5.^w Luke xii. 19, 20.

Under all our weakness and folly, divine compassions are yearning over us, and *the Spirit of the Lord is striving with us.*^{*} To us is that voice of mercy as applicable, as it ever was to *Israel* of old, *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!*[†] For us hath *Moses* dictated that necessary petition, as well as for *Israel*, *Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*[‡]

3. Let us, on this occasion, thankfully acknowledge our obligations to divine Providence, for the continuance of our lives and comforts.

When *David* devoutly said to God, *My times are in thy hand;*^{*} he rejoiced to think that his life and all his comforts were entirely at the disposal of unerring wisdom, almighty power, and unchangeable love and grace. He saw his own hand, as well as the hand of his best earthly friends, utterly insufficient for such a trust. And as for the hand of any enemy, he saw, by faith, its absolute impotence to do any thing against him, except what his God, his all-sufficient friend should, for wise and gracious purposes, see fit to permit or appoint. Thus his Spirit was reconciled to, and made triumphant over, every thing that he at any time felt from the hand of violence and cruelty. Therefore he prayed in faith, *Arise, O Lord, deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword;*
from

* Gen. vi. 3.

† Psalm xc. 12.

‡ Deut. xxxii. 29.

* Psalm xxxi. 15.

from men, which are thy hand, O Lord.^b Therefore by faith he bore Shimei's curses, only saying, *Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him.*^c

If we are continued in the peaceful possession of every enjoyment of life, we have so much the more need of holy caution, lest our treacherous hearts erect themselves into self-sufficiency and self-applause. Then *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them,*^d when to the dishonour of God, and to the cherishing and strengthening of their own pride and ingratitude, *they offer abominable sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous.*^e Certainly, if our lives and comforts are continued, it is infinitely more owing to the gracious providence of God, than to any wisdom or prudence, any activity or diligence, any industry or integrity of our own. How perfectly suitable to the precarious, dependant and feeble state and condition of mortal life, is that apostolical advice; *Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow; for what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*^f With what humility does an inspired Prophet teach us to confess; *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps?*^g And if,

^b Psalm xvii. 13, 14.

^d Prov. i. 12.

^f James iv. 13-15.

^c 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

^e Hab. i. 16.

^g Jer. x. 23.

if, in all our ways we acknowledge God, it is promised, that, so far as shall be for his glory, and for our spiritual and eternal welfare, he will direct our paths.^h He will make every thing work together for our good.ⁱ He will guide us with his counsel, and afterward receive us to glory.^k

Never have the changing scenes of mortal life been filled with such praises and thanksgivings, as when God hath been most humbly and devoutly acknowledged in every thing, and his promises most entirely depended upon. See this in David, and let us admire and imitate. Say as he did, it is God that performeth all things for me.^l I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.^m Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles.ⁿ

4. Tho' the present affliction is very grievous, we may be comfortably assured, that every sincere christian hath a treasure, which no robber can take away; and a life, which no murdurer can destroy.

The sincere christian is one, who repents towards God, and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ

^h Prov. iii. 6.

^k Psalm lxxiii. 24.

^l Psalm iv. 8.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 28.

^j Psalm lvii. 2.

^m Psalm ciii. 1-5.

Christ for salvation, and who demonstrates the sincerity of his repentance and faith by new, holy and persevering obedience. Such a sincere christian is *the wise man*, whom our Lord represents and describes, *which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.*^o Wise, indeed, not only to build upon a rock for stability, but in the height of Heaven itself! Every true christian *lays up for himself treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.*^p Far from being exempted from the most calamitous and disastrous circumstances incident to this mortal state, it may even happen to the true christian, that other men may most unjustly and cruelly *kill his body, but, with all their rage and malice, they are not able to kill his soul.*^q The noblest *life* of a true christian is *hid with Christ in God;*^r and is therefore safe, not merely from mortal men, but even from devils. Tho' Satan *was a murderer from the beginning;*^s and tho', *as a roaring lion, he walketh about, seeking whom he may devour,*^t especially amongst the sincere disciples of Christ; yet all his most subtle and powerful efforts shall be rendered abortive, and he himself shall finally be triumphed over by the feeblest of Christ's humble followers. To have such an unequal combat issue in such victory, may, to an eye of sense, seem the most improbable thing in the world. But the divine
promise

^o Mat. vii. 24, 25.

^q Mat. x. 28.

^s John viii. 44.

^p Mat. vi. 20.

^r Col. iii. 3.

^t 1 Pet. v. 8.

promise puts it beyond all doubt, by which sincere christians have abundant assurance given them, that, as *the captains of Israel*, instructed by *Joshua*, put their feet upon the necks of the kings of the canaanitish nations,^u in token of compleat victory over them; so *the God of peace shall bruise Satan under their feet shortly.*^w

In the present case, there is peculiar pleasure in thinking what good reason we have to hope, that the separate spirit of our deceased friend is now, by the hand of violence, only a little sooner and more suddenly possessed of heavenly riches, and of eternal life and glory.

Such lively hope in the blessedness of his separate spirit, is perfectly consistent with our lamentation over our own loss, and the occasion of it. Well may our hearts bleed, to think of the infatuation and delusion of a fellow-mortal, for the imaginary gain of a trifle, to barter away body and soul; his own present and eternal happiness, and spread anguish and sorrow thro' a family and a neighbourhood! What madness is in the love of money, to force every tender feeling from the heart, and fill it with all the horrors of cruelty and blood! How blinded is the eye of reason, when violence and wrong, injustice and oppression, are made use of to secure peace and repose, and as the most probable expedients for the supply of every want! Lord! what is man? that he should ever divest himself, at this rate, of humanity itself, and become a rival with the most ravenous of the brutal creation! While blood cries for vengeance, let us mourn and lament for the
murderer,

^u Joshua x. 24.

^w Rom. xvi. 20.

murderer, as well as the murdered; since, for the latter, our weeping will surely be turned into rejoicing, but for the former, there will be too much need for everlasting lamentation.

5. It is of no little importance, to mingle this one caution with the present afflictive scene, not to let any death kindle in your breasts such keen resentment, nor excite such deep concern, as the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins.

We have lately joined with town and country, in our detestation of a murderer, and in expressing our just and generous concern for our murdered friend. Would to God there had been as general and cordial a detestation of our own sins, by which we have every one of us murdered and *crucified the Lord of glory!*^{*} Christ *was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him. All we, like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own sinful way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He poured out his soul unto death. He bare the sin of many.*[†] Our sins against a holy God, have really done that, which the Apostle so directly charged upon the immediate murderers and crucifiers of Christ, when he told thousands of them to their faces: *Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.* Unspeakably happy should we each of us be, if, like those thousands of Christ's penitent

D

^{*} 1 Cor. ii. 8.

[†] Isai. liii, 5, 6, 12.

nitent murderers, *we were pricked in our heart,* and with the keenest resentment against our own sins, and with the deepest sorrow for our crucified Lord and Saviour, we were each of us crying out, *what shall we do?* Happy for us beyond expression, if we so repent every one of us, as to answer the design of our having been *baptized in the name of Jesus Christ,* and thereby obtain *the remission of sins,^z and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in this blessed Redeemer!^a* May God deliver us from their inconceivable misery, who, having *crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame,* shall then be found among the impenitent and christless, when *Christ shall come with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him,* and who therefore *shall wail because of him!^b*

6. Tho' joy may seem to be totally banished from us by the present distress, yet in this let us even now rejoice, that thro' the grace of God in Christ, there is forgiveness and eternal life, for the greatest of sinners.

All laws, both human and divine, require that a murderer should not live. It is awful to observe, in the sacred history concerning *Joab*, that tho', after murdering *Abner*, he added to his guilt the murder of *Amazor*, another of the great captains of the host of *Israel*; yet we never read of any penitent concern, which *Joab* ever expressed, for having committed such enormous

^z Acts ii. 23, 37, 38.

^a Acts xxvi. 18.

^b Heb. vi. 6. Rev. i. 7.

mous crimes ; nor any sincere and earnest desire he ever had to obtain pardon and acceptance in the sight of God. On the contrary, when *David* himself was convicted of adultery and murder, his repentance was as truly illustrious, as his crimes had been dreadfully aggravated. No sooner had the royal penitent made his humble confession, *I have sinned against the Lord*, but the prophet *Nathan* said unto him, *the Lord also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die.*^c Such was the glorious extent and efficacy of Gospel grace, even under the Old Testament. This is well accounted for in the New Testament, where the acceptance and salvation of every sincere penitent, in whatever age or nation, ever since the first apostacy of man from God, is abundantly proved to be the sole fruit and purchase of the meritorious sufferings and death, and prevailing mediation and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. With peculiar propriety may he therefore be stiled, *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

As the Gospel is *good tidings of great joy* ;^d so, with chearful confidence, may we apply its particular declarations of pardoning love and grace, and consider each of them as a distinct and inexhaustible fountain of joy unspeakable and full of glory. With how much pleasure have thousands of penitent sinners, read or heard those gracious and heart-reviving words of the compassionate Jesus ! *All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme.*^e Or those encouraging

D 2

^c 2 Sam. xii. 13.^e Mark iii. 28.^d Luke ii. 10.

ging declarations of Peter! Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.^f To Christ gave all the Prophets witness, that thro' his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.^g Or that, to which Paul adds his own happy experience! when he says, *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*^h Or what the beloved John writes, with this professed design, *that our joy may be full!* when he testifies, *that the blood of Jesus Christ the son of God cleanseth us from all sin.* And, *that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*ⁱ By such good and comfortable words, such healing balm, such wells of salvation, such rivers of pleasure and delight, such dawnings and foretastes of eternal joy, how have the penitent and contrite been revived and strengthened! how have their desponding and despairing thoughts been banished! how has light broke in and scattered the thickest darkness of the mind! how have the deepest sorrows been relieved, and changed for overflowing joys! how have even the most deadly wounds of the heart been healed up, and restored to perfect soundness! Thither let us go, with joy and confidence, under all the darkness, diseases, and guilt of our own souls. And, to the utmost of our capacities and opportunities let us there apply for our fellow-sinners, even for those of them whose characters and condition seem to be most hopeless and helpless, without
excepting

^f Acts iii. 19.

^h 1 Tim. i. 15.

^g Acts x. 43.

ⁱ 1 John i. 4, 7, 9.

excepting the most vicious and profligate, no not the most abandoned publicans and harlots, robbers and murtherers. To conclude,

7. Let this sorrowful scene excite us to secure, without delay, our personal interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, that death, in the most sudden moment, or in the most violent form, may find us ready.

This is the indispenfible duty, and the highest happiness of every individual among us. To this we are urged by the worth and excellency of our souls; by the frailties, diseases and totterings of our mortal tabernacles; by the vanities of earthly good; by the nearness and certainty of death, but the uncertainty of the time when we are to die; by all the infinitely important realities of the eternal world; by every divine perfection and promise; by all the awful and lovely name and offices of our heavenly Father, our Saviour, and our Sanctifier; and by our strict account, which it is impossible for us to avoid giving up, before the tremendous bar of the universal judge. While ten thousand motives present themselves, to sollicit our immediate and earnest attention to this *one thing needful*, they may all be properly considered, as either expressed, or implied, in that faithful counsel of our ever adorable and infinitely compassionate Lord, when he says, *Watch, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Be ye ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.*^{*}

This,

^{*} Mat. xxiv. 42, 44.

This, we hope, was the readiness of Mr. Best, for his sudden and violent death. In that distressing moment, we hope, he was *found in Christ*, because it had long been his chief desire and labour *that he might win Christ*.¹ We hope, that *to him to live was Christ*, and consequently that *to him to die was gain*.^m We hope, he is suddenly entered on that glory, for which thro' grace he was many years preparing; and that he is now reaping the blessed fruits of all his repentance and faith, his watching and praying, his self-denial and circumspect walking, his divine love and holy obedience.

Could Mr. Best now offer his parting advice to each of us, O, how earnestly would he call upon us, and entreat us, not to live one day longer, without having a well-grounded hope, that we are reconciled to God, that our sins are pardoned, thro' the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; that our hearts and lives are sanctified by the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit; and that we are looking and labouring more for things eternal than temporal, for heaven than earth, *for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life*, than *for the meat which perisheth*!

Could Mr. Best once more give counsel to his sons, how would every word be mingled with his tears and blood! After all his comfort in them, and all his hopes concerning them; yet to be so violently torn from their embraces, and so abruptly to leave them, encompassed with dangers and enemies, how would love and zeal, death and eternity, give such life to every expression, as they never were conscious to before; tho'

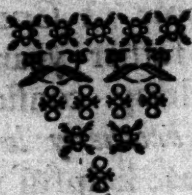
¹ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

^m Phil. i. 21.

tho' the same sentiments had been repeated to them a thousand times ! How would he importunately beseech, and solemnly charge them, *still to flee from the wrath to come*, by flying to the Lord Jesus Christ ! How vehemently would he warn them against an ensnaring world, against the company and conversation of the ungodly, against every thing that hardens the heart, stifles convictions, or puts death and eternity at a distance ! With what seriousness would he recommend a life of converse with God, in devout meditation and prayer ! How would he strive, with all his might, to increase their love to God and Christ, strengthen their resolutions for strict godliness, fix their attention, more than ever, to the word of God, and join them in closer and more intimate friendship with the people of God ! How would all the bowels of a father yearn over them, and every tender, melting consideration be urged with them, *to let brotherly love continue*, and to their utmost to be helpful to one another in all their temporal concerns, but especially in those which belong to their souls and eternity.

Never, I verily believe, have four brothers, in the maturity of manhood, and under heavy affliction, felt more tenderly, or lamented more affectionately. Your very souls, my dear friends, have been all poured out over such a father, and such a death. You have thousands who pity you, and mourn with you, and for you ; tho' such an universal sympathy is absolutely unable to heal your wounded hearts, or even wipe away your tears. But you have one consolation in reserve. If four such brothers shall perseveringly walk as the sons of God, as the heirs

heirs of Heaven, as joint heirs with Jesus Christ, then all your weeping will end in rejoicing, your dear Father will meet you again with songs of triumph; millions of angels and saints will rejoice in you, and rejoice with you, thro' a glorious eternity. May God of his infinite mercy grant this thro' Jesus Christ!
Amen.



THE

T H E
N A R R A T I V E.

MR. *Francis Best*, whose parents were persons of serious piety, was born at *Kidderminster*, November 27, 1703, in the next morning after the great wind. At his death he wanted five months to compleat his *sixty-eighth* year. Tho' he was so far advanced in life, yet he still retained a large measure of strength and activity.

For many years he had been accustomed to walk from his own house, at *Caldwall-Mill*, near *Kidderminster*, to *Bewdley-Market*, every *Saturday*, about three measured Miles, in a publick and very pleasant foot-path. On the *eighth* of *June*, 1771, being *Saturday morning*, he went from his own house as usual, about *half after nine*. His way to *Bewdley* led through a field, where a thick hedge on his right hand concealed from him the view of another and more frequented foot-path that lay through an adjoining field; both which paths soon after unite. In the said field he was about mid-way between *Kidderminster* and *Bewdley*, and upon ground so much elevated, as to have an extensive prospect of the surrounding country. The *Murtherer* was met between *that* and *Kidderminster*, by a man coming from *Bewdley*, but a little while before Mr. *Best* came thither. There, it appears, the *Murtherer* lingered, till Mr. *Best* had passed him, and then immediately following Mr. *Best*, knocked him down with the stroke of a thick oak bludgeon, on the back part of his head. It nevertheless appears, that Mr. *Best* got hold of the bludgeon, nor could the *Murtherer* recover the full command of it till he had cut Mr. *Best's* hand with a knife, and then, after repeating his blows, he cut his throat. He took out of Mr. *Best's* breeches pockets, it is thought, about *twelve pounds*; but missed *sixty guineas*, that were in a canvas bag in his waistcoat pocket; for

E

Mr.

Mr. *Best*, happened at that time, to have more money about him than usual. At that juncture, a man was walking in the other path, heard a distressing cry, and soon after its ceasing, saw a man, who, as it afterwards appeared, was the *Murderer*, making his escape over a distant hedge, in a direction contrary to both the foot-paths. And presently another man, who was coming from *Bewdley*, passed close by the mangled corps, then almost breathless, knew it to be Mr. *Best*, and, filled with horror and trembling, ran with all speed, to give the first intelligence of it to Mr. *Best*'s family.

The *Murderer*, *John Child*, was born at *Wribben-hall*, a suburb of *Bewdley*, yet in the parish of *Kidderminster*, of a worthy family, to whom he had long been, by his great irregularities, an unspeakable burthen and sorrow. He was about twenty-five years old. His person was tall and stout, but very distinguishing, by reason of a club-foot on his left side. He had been apprentice to a *Die-sinker* at *Birmingham*, and afterwards became a journeyman *Weaver* in *Kidderminster*. But his idleness, bad company, gaming, cocking, and many other excesses, prompted him to those methods for his support, which hastened his miserable end.

He acknowledged in jail, that himself only was concerned in breaking open a chest, in the house of Mr. *Thomson*, Cork-cutter, in *Wribben-hall*, and stealing from thence seventeen guineas and one thirty-six shilling piece. By this particular confession he vindicated the characters of two other men, viz. *Andrew Fitzgerald* and *Barnard Whithrow Garnish*, who were both of them confined in *Worcester Jail*, on suspicion of that robbery, and were, at the last *Affizes*, discharged by proclamation.

Child being well known to Mr. *Best*, he must have way-laid him, with an intent to murder as well as rob him; except he had thoughts of flying afterward from his country, since his club-foot made him so easily discovered and known. After murdering Mr. *Best*, his first retreat was to a retired part of the banks of the river *Severn*, where he endeavoured to free himself from the blood with which he was besmeared, though he did it very imperfectly. He then crossed the river at *Blackstone ferry*, and was observed, immediately on entering the boat, to fall down flat on his face, and to draw his club-foot under him. The same day, about three in the afternoon, he appeared in *Kidderminster*, hired a horse to carry him

to *Birmingham*, and ordered it to be ready for him to mount at the *Turnpike*, which is about half a mile out of the town. In the mean time, he called at a shop or two, bought himself leather breeches and other things, and, mingling with company that were talking over the prevailing news of the horrid murder, he added some of his own remarks upon it: he particularly observed, with an oath, that *the Murderer, whoever he was, would be very sorry at missing the sixty guineas*. He had been met near the place, where the murder was committed, by a man and woman, who were both of them very soon taken up at *Kidderminster*, on suspicion; and who, in giving the magistrates an account of themselves, described him by his *club-foot*. He had also been seen going toward the same place, by Mr. *Callow*, the Bailiff of *Kidderminster*, who was that morning walking to *Bewdley*, in company with another inhabitant of *Kidderminster*, and as Mr. *Callow* heard of the murder before he left *Bewdley*, he was determined to seize him as soon as possible. On the whole, his riding away to *Birmingham* was reasonably prevented by his being so speedily taken into custody that afternoon; and the next day, *June the ninth*, he confessed, before the magistrates, that he was an accomplice, but charged the murder upon *Thomas Bourne*, who was then in the service of a farmer about six miles from *Kidderminster*.

On *Monday morning, June the tenth*, he attempted his own death, by stabbing himself in the belly with a little knife, which had incautiously been lent him while eating his breakfast. Though he then thought himself dying, he still persisted in charging *Bourne* with the murder. The wound, which he gave himself, left him very ill, and in that situation, before the middle of the day, he, by several messengers sent for Mr. *Fawcett*, to pray with him. The office, in such circumstances, was very undesirable. Mr. *Fawcett*, in conversing with him, only aimed at alarming his conscience, with a just sense of this heinous crime, and of all his sins of heart and life. He particularly asked him, why he should attempt to murder himself, if another person was the murderer of Mr. *Best*? *I was*, says he, *an accomplice, and therefore I am as guilty, as if I had been the Murderer*. When Mr. *Fawcett* asked him, what he more especially desired to have mentioned in prayer, he very sensibly and seriously

replied, *that God would be pleased to give me sincere repentance and faith.*

On Saturday, *June the fifteenth*, he again sent for Mr. *Fawcett*, who then expressly told him, that he waited upon him without any desire to hear a confession of his crime, nor had any authority to ask it; but that all his desire was, to convince him of the omniscience of God, the impossibility of concealing any part of his guilty temper and conduct from the eternal judge, and the absolute necessity of his confessing all the sins of his heart and life to God, in order to his sincere repentance and well-grounded hope of divine forgiveness through a Redeemer; that, if ever he became a real penitent, there would be no need to ask him the circumstances of his late crime, but he would freely and without the least disguise lay open all the aggravations of his injustice and cruelty before his fellow-creatures, with the deepest self-abhorrence; and that he would be far more grieved and distressed for his sins against God, than for any shame or misery which his sins brought upon him in the sight of Men. He readily acknowledged the propriety of such sentiments, and that he now saw their truth and importance more than ever. He again desired prayer, that God would give him sincere repentance and faith. It was pleasing to hear him again and again express so good a desire. And it must be allowed, that his religious education had laid a foundation for much more knowledge of divine things, than is usually to be met with in persons of such an abandoned character. Would to God, this *Narrative*, could conclude with representing the genuine evidences of his sincere conversion, though *at the eleventh hour!* Nothing in the world would have afforded more general satisfaction, and especially to his mourning relatives.

He was visited with great compassion and assiduity by the Rev. Mr. *Mathews*, the Curate of *Kidderminster*, till his removal to *Worcester Jail*. His conveyance thither was in a sort of *Horse-Litter*, on account of his remaining weakness, occasioned by the wound in his belly.

Before the *Affixe* came on, he confessed to the Ordinary, the Rev. Mr. *Taylor*, that *he had no accomplice in the murder*. Yet in the course of his trial, on *Tuesday, July the sixteenth*, he denied that he had any hand, either in the murder, or robbery, contrary to the strongest evidences of so many witnesses upon oath. One of them testified the identity of a piece of money, which was found

found on him, when he was apprehended, and that the said witness had paid the said piece, with other cash, to Mr. *Best's* son, on the *Thursday* evening before the murder; the said son also testified, that he had paid the same piece to his father, Mr. *Best*, the same evening. Two other witnesses declared, that they found the bludgeon hid in the hedge, about three hundred yards from the place, where the murder was committed, and near to the very spot, where *Child*, while he was in custody at *Kidderminster*, had given direction to the magistrates to seek it. The carpenter also, out of whose shop the *Murderer* had taken the bludgeon, testified that he missed it, the very morning when the murder was committed, and that it exactly corresponded to another part of it, which was left behind in his shop, and from which the *Murderer* had, unknowing to the carpenter, divided it with a saw. Another witness testified, that having been *Child's* school-fellow and intimate friend, he went to see him three or four days after his attempt to murder himself, and that he then said to *Child*, "Friend *Jack*, I suppose after Mr. *Best* was dead, you thought every bush or tree that moved, was in pursuit of you, and that if you could have restored his life to him again, you would have given all the world." Upon this, *Child* smote his breast, and cried out, O God! if I had ten thousand worlds, I would give them all to enjoy one hour's peace which I had before.

His sentence was, to be hanged at the county gallows, and his body to be dissected and anatomized. He stood more than two hours before the honourable Judge *Aston*, and a crowded court, with amazing confidence and unconcern, and received the awful sentence of death, and the serious and pertinent address of his lordship, without any apparent alteration of countenance or spirits. When the bludgeon, with which Mr. *Best* was knocked down, was produced in court, he did not seem to be at all affected with the sight of it, but very composedly declared, *he never saw it before*; though, as hinted above, it was found by his own direction, near the place where the murder was committed. Just after sentence was passed on him, he boldly asked the judge, to the surprise of all that heard it, *Who was to have the money that was found upon him, when he was apprehended?* His lordship answered, "that no one had any right to it, but the executor or administrator of the deceased." Accordingly

ingly, Mr. *Watkins*, town-clerk of *Kidderminster*, and one of the coroners of the county, delivered it to the late Mr. *Best's* son.

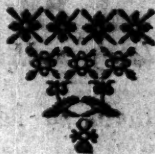
According to his sentence, he was executed at the county gallows, on *Thursday, July the eighteenth*, and the next morning his body was taken to *Worcester Infirmary* for dissection. *Thomas Bourne*, whom *Child* had falsely accused of being an accomplice with him in the said murder and robbery, was discharged from jail on *Monday, July the fifteenth*, and was present to see his execution, the friends of Mr. *Best* having lodged no indictment against him.

The Rev. Mr. *Taylor*, the *Ordinary*, in his letter, dated *July 21, 1771*, says concerning the unhappy *John Child*: "His behaviour after sentence, and at execution, was very decent, and seemingly devout. I daily visited him ever since he was in prison, almost spent the whole day with him on *Wednesday*, and on *Thursday* from between *seven* and *eight* of the clock, till he suffered, was wholly with him in reading, prayer, and the most pressing exhortation. When he related to me the horrid deed, just before he left the jail, it was accompanied with a flood of tears, and an ardent desire to be reconciled to the family of the *deceased*, and was sorry that it was not in his power to make any farther atonement to them, than by acknowledging his guilt. At the gallows he acknowledged both the murder and robbery, and exhorted the by-standers to take warning, and to be careful how they broke the Sabbath; to avoid bad houses, and gaming, as well as bad company, which had been the causes of his untimely end."

The writer of a paper, inserted in the *Worcester Journal*, *July 18, 1771*, and signed, *Bewdley, D.* says on this occasion: "It seems natural to desire and hope, from the above circumstances, that the justices, magistrates, and constables, will more than ever exert themselves, with peculiar zeal and vigilance, to discover and suppress all disorderly publick houses, as they are bound to do by the nature and design of their offices, and the oaths they have solemnly taken; and that they will have a watchful eye over those, who are often absent from home, frequenters of markets and fairs, where they can have no proper business; suspected of gaming and gambling, and who have no visible honest way of supporting themselves and their families. It is much
" to

" to be wished, that magistrates would particularly exert
 " their authority, to suppress cockings; not merely be-
 " cause they are inhuman, a reproach to a christian na-
 " tion, especially to its magistracy; but because they are
 " the ruin of many persons and families, and the sources
 " of fraud, violence, and cruelty. It is also much to
 " be wished, that the clergy, and all parents and masters,
 " may be led by these circumstances, which have been
 " the subjects of general discourse, to take particular pains
 " at this time, and at all times, with those committed
 " to their care, or over whom they have influence, to
 " inculcate upon them the necessity of sobriety, diligence,
 " shunning bad company, of *doing justly, loving mercy,*
 " *and walking humbly with God*, to whom all are to give
 " an account."

THE END.



6518
BOOKS published by the Rev. Mr. B. FAWCETT,
 and sold by J. Buckland, at No. 57, in Pater-
 noster-Row, LONDON; and J. Eddowes, in
 SHREWSBURY.

1. **A** Compassionate Address to the Christian Negroes
 in *Virginia*, and other *British Colonies in North
 America*. The Second Edition. Price 3 d.
2. The Grand Inquiry, *Am I in Christ, or not?* The
 Third Edition. 6 d.
3. The Sacred Almoner in Two Discourses. 8 d.
4. A Funeral Sermon for the Rev. Mr. *Darracott*. The
 Third Edition. 6 d.
5. A Sermon occasioned by the Death of King *George II.*
 and the Accession of King *George III.* 6 d.
6. A Sermon on the Coronation of King *George III.* 6 d.
7. Children shouting their Hosannas to Christ. A Sermon
 on the Death of a Child, who was Eight Years old; with
 some Account of her pious Temper while she was in Health;
 and of her remarkable Expressions in her last Illness. 3 d.
8. Heavenly Paths. The Fourth Edition. By an Ano-
 nymous Author. 3 d.
9. Mr. *Baxter's* Saints everlasting Rest, abridg'd. 8vo,
 5s. 12mo. 3s.
10. ———— Converse with God in Solitude, abridg'd.
 6d.
11. ———— Dying Thoughts, abridg'd. 1s.
12. ———— Causes and Danger of slighting Christ
 and his Gospel, abridg'd. The Second Edition. 3 d.
- Life of Faith, abridg'd. 1s. 6d.

10 FEB 58

Where may be had, lately published, (Price 1s.)

An Abridgement of Mr. *Baxter's*
D I A L O G U E S
 O N
PERSONAL and FAMILY RELIGION,
 BETWEEN
 A MINISTER and one of his PARISHIONERS.
 To which are added
F O R M S of P R A Y E R
 For the FAMILY and the CLOSET.